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The Devotio Moderna, the Emotions and the Search for ‘Dutchness’¹

MATHILDE VAN DIJK

From the nineteenth century the adherents of the Devotio Moderna were regarded as the archetypical Dutch, mainly because of the measured way in which they handled their emotions. This article challenges this notion by a careful study of the Devotio Moderna as an emotional community, in which different emotional styles were developed. It examines perceptions and performances of emotions in Devotio Moderna biographies, focusing on the seminal emotions of fear and love. Biographies provide insight into the emotional styles of different groups in Devotio Moderna, men in contrast to women, sisters and brothers of the Common Life as opposed to regular canons and canonesses.

De Moderne Devotie, de emoties en de zoektocht naar een Nederlandse identiteit

Dit artikel zet een kritische noot bij de toe-eigening van de moderne devoten als de eerste echte Nederlanders, zoals die vanaf de negentiende eeuw gebruikelijk is. Van oudsher speelde de emotionele stijl van de devoten hierbij een grote rol: Nederlandse onderzoekers herkenden die als typisch Nederlands. Dit artikel bestudeert de Moderne Devotie als *emotional community*. Het richt zich op devote percepties en *performances* van emoties in hun laatmiddeleeuwse context, in het bijzonder met betrekking tot angst en liefde, omdat hieruit de andere emoties voortkwamen. In het artikel worden biografieën uit de Moderne Devotie onderzocht: enerzijds van mannen en vrouwen, anderzijds van zusters en broeders van het gemene leven en reguliere kanunniken en kanunnikessen. Hierdoor is het mogelijk verschillen in en ontwikkelingen van emotionele stijl in kaart te brengen, zoals die zich in de Moderne Devotie voordeden.

The emotional history of the Devotio Moderna is and has always been a hot topic. Long before the history of emotions was defined as a separate field, historical interest in the emotional history of the adherents of this movement was very evident. In the nineteenth century Protestant historians and theologians claimed that the Devout were forerunners of the Reformation.² Dutch scholars in particular regarded them as examples of a typically Dutch manifestation of it, not least because of the way in which they expressed emotions.

Their appropriation of the Devout is a classic example of the creation of a *lieu de mémoire* – the construction of a historical phenomenon as being typical for a group's identity. As far as Dutch theologians and historians were concerned, the Modern Devout summarised what being Dutch was all about. According to them, the adherents of the Devotio Moderna were level-headed. Unlike their 'foreign' counterparts, who incidentally are usually not named, the Devout were considered not to be given to panegyrics of divine love, excessive weeping or tormenting their own bodies. Considered to be archotypically Dutch, the Devout were regarded as disapproving of such displays, keeping their emotions where they belonged: within. The Dutch scholars working on the Devotio Moderna praised them for their measured behaviour, which expressed depth and truthfulness and did not rely on showy affectations. Furthermore, they admired the Devout for being frugal, practice-oriented and tolerant – just as they viewed the Dutch national character and, consequently, themselves. They felt that the adherents were among the first to practise interior piety, which they regarded as typical of Protestantism, and which came 'naturally' to the Devout because they were Dutch. Some among their number even argued that the Reformation actually started in the Netherlands, and regarded the Devout as the very inventors of the essence of 'Protestantism', long before its elaboration by Luther and Calvin.³

As early as 1829, the Leiden church historians Johannes and Theodorus Clarisse criticised this construction of the Devout as archetypical Protestant, arguing that this image was the result of patriotism rather than research.⁴ Later, their Amsterdam colleague Willem Moll pointed out the

1 I thank the guest editors, the editors and the referees for their valuable suggestions.

2 C. Ullmann, *Johann Wessel der Hauptrepräsentant reformatorische Theologie im 15ten Jahrhundert nebst den Brüdern vom gemeinsamen Leben namentlich: Gerhard Groot, Florentius Radewyns, Gerhard Zerbolt und Thomas von Kempen und den Deutschen Mystikern: Ruysbroeck, Suso, Tauler, dem Verfasser der Deutschen Theologie und Staupitz in ihre Beziehung zur Reformation* (Gotha 1866) lx and 561.

3 A. IJpey and I.J. Dermout, *Geschiedenis van de Nederlandsch Hervormde Kerk* (Breda 1819-1827) 4-8.

4 Johannes and Theodorus Clarisse, 'Over den geest en denkwijze van Geert Groete, kenbaar uit zijne schriften', *Archief voor kerkelijke geschiedenis inzonderheid van Nederland* 1 (1829) 355-356 and 2 (1830) 263.

similarities between the Devout and other late medieval reform movements.⁵ Nevertheless, the view of the *Devotio Moderna* as foreshadowing the Reformation persisted until well into the twentieth century. As a result, the movement became an object of confessional debate, the apex of which was the publication of the Nijmegen historian Regnerus Post's *De Moderne Devotie. Geert Grote en zijn stichtingen* (1940). Although Post acknowledged that the *Devotio Moderna* was part of the cultural heritage of all Christians, he defined it as essentially Catholic, pointing to the monastic flavour of *Devotio Moderna* ideals. Although the first Devout did not take vows, they still felt that they had to withdraw from the world and live ascetically in single-sex communities – thus, in a distinctly un-Protestant fashion. Eventually many Devout created actual monasteries. Despite Post's designation of the *Devotio Moderna* as 'purely Catholic', he still considered it to be 'a Dutch movement': '[...] It began in the Low Countries [...] owed its specific character to it'.⁶

Today *Devotio Moderna* studies have shed their confessional fetters. In part this has been due to international interest in the field. German and American scholars with no interest in a Dutch confessional or nationalistic agenda developed a new perspective on the movement, seeing it as a European endeavour spanning almost two centuries, from the 1370s to the 1550s, and spreading throughout the Low Countries, the Rhineland and parts of Central Europe.⁷ Moll's contention that the movement should be seen in the context of

5 Willem Moll, *Kerkgeschiedenis van Nederland vóór de Hervorming*. 2 Volumes (Amsterdam 1864-1869) Volume I, xl. See also my article, "'Door hun geestigen stijl en evangelischen inhoud". Willem Moll en de Moderne Devotie', in: Mirjam de Baar and Mathilde van Dijk (eds.), *Herinnering en identiteit in het vrijzinnig protestantisme* (Hilversum 2009) 43-54.

6 R.R. Post, *De Moderne Devotie. Geert Grote en zijn stichtingen* (Amsterdam 1940) 147: '[...] een Nederlandsche beweging [...] Zij ontstond in de Nederlanden [...] ontving daar haar eigen karakter [...] [was] zuiver katholiek'. This quotation is missing from the English edition, although the translator shows an awareness of Post's polemical stance judging by the title, *The Modern Devotion: Confrontation with Humanism and Reformation* (Leiden 1968).

7 Thanks to the efforts of the American scholar John Van Engen, for example in his *Sisters and Brothers of the Common Life: The Devotio Moderna and*

the World of the Later Middle Ages (Philadelphia 2008), and German scholars, most notably the research group of the Münster historian Nikolaus Staubach. See his 'Text als Prozess: zur Pragmatik des Schreibens und Lesens in der Devotio Moderna', in: Hagen Keller, Klaus Grubmüller and Nikolaus Staubach (eds.), *Pragmatische Dimensionen mittelalterlicher Schriftlichkeit. Akten des internationalen Kolloquiums 26.-29. May 1999* (Munich 2002) 251-276 and, by his pupils: Theo Klausmann, *Consuetudo consuetudine vincitur. Die Hausordnungen der Brüder vom gemeinsamen Leben im Bildungs- und Sozialisationsprogramm der Devotio Moderna* (Münster 2003); Thomas Kock, *Die Buchkultur der Devotio Moderna. Handschriftenproduktion, Literaturversorgung und Bibliotheksaufbau im Zeitalter des Medienwechsels* (Frankfurt am Main, etc. 1999); Bertram Lesser, *Johannes Busch: Chronist der Devotio Moderna. Werkstruktur, Überlieferung, Rezeption* (Frankfurt am Main 2005).

similar reform movements throughout late medieval Europe is now generally accepted. Recently however, the appropriation of the Devout as archetypically Dutch has returned in a context in which the search for ‘true Dutchness’ appears to have become a national obsession, judging by such initiatives as creating a national historical canon.⁸ The persistence of the view of the movement as foreshadowing the Dutch national character warrants pessimism about the impact of specialist research on popular and scholarly perceptions of the Devotio Moderna, and runs counter to the course of Devotio Moderna studies in the past few decades.

Subject, purpose, method

This article aims to assess the way in which the Modern Devout dealt with their emotions. Furthermore, it will result in a critique of the way scholars from the nineteenth century onwards used Devotio Moderna views and performances of emotions to claim the adherents of this late medieval reform movement as a *lieu de mémoire* of the Dutch national character. Therefore I shall concentrate on the first Devout in the IJssel area as these are the main subjects of the research done by those claiming them as typically Dutch. The following charts how the Devout viewed their interior and exterior lives and the connection between these. In addition, it assesses which emotions and performances met with approval or disapproval and why this is so. Furthermore, I shall look into the question of whether views and performances of emotions developed throughout Devotio Moderna and assess the impact of differences within the movement, for example, between men and women, or between the semi-religious, such as the Sisters and Brothers of the Common Life, and the regular canons and canonesses. Finally I shall study in how far the Devout were different from other late medieval reform movements.

The present study aims to be a companion piece to an article by the Flemish medievalists Jeroen Deploige and An-Katrien Hanselaer, who assessed Devotio Moderna perspectives of emotions and their performances by a careful textual analysis of collections of biographies of female Devout.⁹ In contrast,

8 Herman Pleij, ‘Het erfgoed van de Moderne Devotie’, *Mijn Stad, Mijn Dorp. Historisch Tijdschrift Overijssel* 2 (2011) 11–15; the more measured Frits van Oostrom, *Wereld in woorden. Geschiedenis van de Nederlandse literatuur 1300–1400* (Amsterdam 2013) 509–511.

9 An-Katrien Hanselaer and Jeroen Deploige, “‘Van groeter bannicheit hoers herten’. De conditionering van de alledaagse gevoelswereld in vrouwelijke gemeenschappen uit de laatmiddeleeuwse Moderne Devotie’, *Tijdschrift voor Geschiedenis* 126:4 (2013) 480–499. I thank the authors for allowing me to view their article before publication and Joris Oddens for telling me about their work.

I have used a more varied array of sources, including both male and female biographies, and focus more on the intellectual context of the Devout in the Early Church and other late medieval religious movements. The emphasis is on how the Devout interpreted what transpired in both the Early Church material and in more recent religious movements in order to design a feasible way of pious life for themselves. Another difference with Hanselaer's and Deploige's work is that I connect my findings to current discussions in the Netherlands about the Devout as exemplifying the Dutch national character.

Studying the Devout emotions has its difficulties, above all because the word 'emotions' did not exist – a problem noted by many students of the history of emotions in the Middle Ages.¹⁰ When referring to what goes on inside a human being and how this is revealed on the outside, the Devout used several words: 'passions' (*passiones*), 'affections' (*affectus*, *affectiones*), 'qualities of the soul' (*qualitates animi*), or more specifically, 'love' (*dilectio*, *caritas*, *amor*) and 'fear' (*timor*) or their Middle Dutch equivalents.

An additional problem is that we are dealing with people from the distant past and thus it is doubtful that the meaning they gave to words such as 'fear' and 'love' was the same as ours. In fact, this is the problem that the cultural anthropologist Clifford Geertz tackled when reflecting on the study of unfamiliar cultures. In his actor-oriented approach he argued that an anthropologist should describe cultural phenomena in the terms used by the actors in that culture. He also emphasised that anthropological study involves interpretation, referring to concepts current in the discipline and the anthropologist's own cultural context, which may be closer to or further removed from how the actors understood their practices, thoughts or, for that matter, emotions.¹¹ Likewise, it should be clear that here a history of the emotions is seen as a tool for understanding Devotio Moderna perspectives on the workings of the interior and exterior life of human beings: while they did not use the word 'emotion', what they describe as happening within a person or on the exterior can be interpreted by historians as connected to 'emotions' such as we understand them today.

In addition to Geertz, this article owes much to the American medievalist Barbara Rosenwein, particularly to her concepts of 'emotional communities' and 'emotional styles'. The Devotio Moderna will be treated as such a community, as a group which shared 'a common stake, interest, values and goals' and in which people were trained in particular views and styles of performances of emotions, both internally and externally.¹² The members of

10 For example, Barbara Rosenwein, *Emotional Communities in the Early Middle Ages* (Ithaca, London 2006) 3-5; Thomas Dixon, *From Passions to Emotions: The Creation of a Secular Psychological Category* (Cambridge 2003) 19-20.

11 Clifford Geertz, 'Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture', in: Idem, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York 1973) 5-41.

12 Rosenwein, *Emotional Communities*, 24.

religious communities in the Devotio Moderna sought to imitate Christ by practising the virtues. Primarily, this involved a recalibration of the interior life of the individual, as they felt that virtue and vice were primarily a matter of the inner being. As Rosenwein argues about her early medieval examples, nothing could be further from them than childish directness regarding the emotions.¹³ Rather, the Devout aimed to rise above their natural feelings and to meticulously guide them into the proper shape and appropriate performance.

The Devotio Moderna was also a textual community, as defined by the Canadian historian Brian Stock.¹⁴ Reading and writing were regarded as indispensable in learning to focus on God and preparing for meditation and prayer.¹⁵ Fundamental texts offered models on which to structure oneself. Unlike choir brothers and sisters, many lay brothers and sisters were unable to read. However, the customary readings at table, manual labour and at religious services ensured that they would also be immersed in texts.

The Devout agreed about which texts to use: Scripture, the Church Fathers, the lives of the saints, particularly material concerning the Desert Fathers and other Early Church saints, and a few later writers, such as the German Dominican Henry Suso. Later Devotio Moderna authors such as Geert Grote were added to this list.¹⁶ How familiar these authors and texts were is illustrated by works such as the *Formula vivendi* by Salome Sticken, the prioress of the Windesheim canonesses of Saints Mary and Agnes at Diepenveen, who wrote it as an advisory text for the sisters in Westphalia. The ease with which she refers to and quotes both Church Fathers and Devout leaders reveals that she could be confident that the sisters who were to read or listen to her text knew what she was talking about.¹⁷

13 As Johan Huizinga described medieval performances of emotions in his *Herfsttij der Middeleeuwen. Studie over de levens- en gedachtenvormen der veertiende en vijftiende eeuw in Frankrijk en de Nederlanden* (Haarlem 1919, reprint 1975) 1.

14 Brian Stock, *The Implications of Literacy: Written Language and Models of Interpretation in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (Princeton 1983) 90-92.

15 Gerard Zerbolt of Zutphen, *De spiritualibus ascensionibus/La montée du coeur*, Sr. Francis Joseph Legrand (ed.) (Turnhout 2006) 44.

16 Mathilde van Dijk, 'Performing the Fathers in the Devotio Moderna', in: Iris Kwiatowski and Jörg Engelbrecht (eds.), *Die Devotio Moderna. Sozialer und Kultureller Transfer (1350-1580)* (Münster 2013) 232-236.

17 Salome Sticken, 'Vivendi Formula', in: W.J. Kühler, *Johannes Brinckerinck en zijn klooster te Diepenveen* (Leiden 1914) f. 169v and f. 171r.

Sources

The main sources used here will be four sets of biographies of exemplary brothers and sisters from the IJssel area: the sisterbooks of the Sisters of the Common Life at Master Geert's House in Deventer; the regular canonesses of Saints Agnes and Mary at Diepenveen; the *Scriptum* and its continuations by Rudolph Dier of Muiden, Peter of Hoorn and others about the Brothers of the Common Life in Father Florens' House in Deventer; and Johannes Busch's *De viris illustribus*, about the regular canons at Saint Mary in Windesheim.¹⁸ These collections of lives were part of a traditional genre in educational literature from the Early Church onwards, starting with the lives and sayings of the Desert Fathers. They belong to the sub-genre of the brother- or sisterbook. The authors came from the same houses as the subjects they described and they wrote to educate their fellow brothers or sisters. Therefore when they described what goes on inside or outside a person they intended to provide a model of how to feel and how to behave.¹⁹

Their works are excellent sources on Devotio Moderna ideology and practice concerning emotions. Contrary to other educational genres such as treatises, biographies focus on individuals. They describe emotions as they were practiced. Furthermore, they provide an insight into differences in the ideology and performance of emotions, for example between people who

18 On Master Geert's House: D. de Man (ed.), *Hier beginnen sommige stichtige punten van onsen oelden zusteren naar het te Arnhem berustende handschrift* (The Hague 1919), to be cited as 'G'. On Diepenveen: Deventer, City Archive and Athaeneum Library, respectively MS. 101 E 26, 'Regular canonesses, Saints Agnes and Mary', Diepenveen, 1524, cop. Griet Esschinges, and Zwolle, Rijksarchief MS. Coll. Van Rhemen, inv. nr. 1, 'Regular canonesses, Saints Agnes and Mary', Diepenveen, 1534, cop. Griete Koesters. This manuscript contains the oldest version of the Diepenveen sisterbook and is commonly known as DV. The later manuscript was edited in *Van den doechden der vuriger ende stichtiger susteren van Diepen Veen (Handschrift D)*, D.A. Brinkerink (ed.) (Groningen 1904). This manuscript will be cited as 'D'. For an outline of the differences: Wybren Scheepsma, *Deemoed en devotie. De koorvrouwen van Diepenveen en hun geschriften* (Amsterdam 1997) 121-141 and Anne M. Bollmann,

Frauenleben und Frauenliteratur in der Devotio Moderna. Volkssprachige Schwesternbücher in literarhistorischer Perspektive (PhD thesis, University of Groningen 2004) 457-492. On Father Florens' House: Rudolph Dier of Muiden, Petrus of Hoorn and others, *Scriptum de Magistro Gherardo Grote, domini Florencii et multis aliis devotis fratribus*, in: G. Dumbar (ed.), *Analecta seu vetera aliquot scripta inedita* 1 (Deventer 1719) 1-143. On Windesheim: Johannes Busch, 'Liber de viris illustribus', in: Karl Grube (ed.), *Johannes Busch Chronicon Windeshemense und Liber de reformatione monasteriorum* (Halle 1886) 1-244. This book is abbreviated as DVI. This text survives in two versions, from 1456-1459 and 1459-1464. See for the main differences V. Becker, 'Eene onbekende kronijk van het klooster te Windesheim', *Bijdragen en Mededeelingen van het Historisch Genootschap* 10 (1887) 376-445. On DVI: Lesser, *Busch*, 127-208.

19 An assessment of the genre in Bollmann, *Frauenleben*.

had taken vows and those who had not, or between men and women, not least because of the authors' attention to individual differences.²⁰ As the biographies were written over a period extending from the late fourteenth century to the early sixteenth century they might reveal whether there was development within the *Devotio Moderna* as far as the treatment of emotions was concerned.

The collections are somewhat different in format, not least because of the authors' different temperaments. Dier's *Scriptum* and the *Continuatio* by Peter of Hoorn provide rather businesslike accounts of the lives of founding father Geert Grote and the first Brothers of the Common Life. The biographies towards the end of the collection are more detailed. The tales in the Deventer sisterbook are also short, concentrating on a sister's excellence in one or, at best, a few virtues, rather than providing a full biography. The Diepenveen sisterbook also provides accounts of the lives of the sisters before they entered the convent, occasionally including extensive tales about people close to the sisters, such as parents, siblings, friends and husbands.²¹ Busch, in contrast, provides extensive tales in *De viris illustribus*, in which however, he rarely included anecdotes of the lives of the brothers or about their nearest and dearest before their entry into the monastery.

Reforming the self

Before moving to the content of the biographies, an assessment of the intellectual and social contexts in which the Modern Devout developed their ideas on emotions is required. From their perspective, the human race had led a dangerous life ever since the Fall. Following Saint Augustine (354-430), they felt that humankind was naturally inclined towards sin. The challenge was to reform oneself, returning to the original state before the Fall, in accordance with a perfect image and likeness of God. This entailed a total makeover, inside and out, a redirecting of thoughts, emotions and practices from carnality towards the Divine. It required full commitment and had no chance of success without the help of Divine Grace.²²

Like the adherents of the Poverty Movement such as the Mendicants and the Beguines, the Devout considered the imitation of Christ to be the route to perfection. However, they were conscious of a long line of failures before them, as Busch described in his *De viris illustribus*. The Poverty Movement was

20 Hanselaer and Deploige, 'Bannicheit', 482.

21 For example, the Van Rijsen sisters, DV, f. 175v-190r; D, f. 117v-126v.

22 A.G. Weiler, 'Over de geestelijke praktijk van de Moderne Devotie', in: J. Andriessen, P. Bange and A.G. Weiler (eds.), *De doorwerking van de Moderne Devotie. Windesheim 1387-1987* (Hilversum 1988) 29-45.

no exception: many Mendicants had become less strict about poverty and many Beguines had acquired a reputation for heresy.²³ Human weakness was the perennial problem, as Busch argued: given humankind's natural inclination to carnality it was difficult to stay on track.²⁴ More wary of themselves than their forebears, the Devout consciously sought a feasible way of imitating Christ.²⁵ This is why Van Engen's translation of 'modernus' as 'modern-day' is actually the best explanation of what the Devout were about, as they were recreating the devotional lives of Christ and the apostles in a manner which would work for them in their late medieval context.²⁶

Searching for the right format, they experimented with different forms of life. Geert Grote started a community of poor women without vows, soon to be copied by men and other women. Unfortunately this created a problem as the outside world did not always see the difference between them and the Beguines, at least not until they were officially recognised by the Council of Constance.²⁷ Eventually many Devout took vows, both to avoid the suspicion of outsiders and due to concerns about their own carnal nature. The latter seems to have been the most important in the long run. As *Devotio Moderna* history progressed they came to feel that too much contact with the world would cause too much distraction. Some of the Devout who continued without vows evolved into having more secluded lifestyles, building their own chapels, rather than using the parish church.²⁸ Especially as far as women were concerned, living in an actual convent ended any pastoral ambition as it always meant clausturation.²⁹

The models of the Fathers

The Devout argued for such choices with reference to authorities. In addition to Scripture, the Church Fathers – especially Saint Augustine and the literature concerning the Desert Fathers, as well as Bernard of Clairvaux – were their main sources of inspiration. Moreover, Suso appears to have acquired an almost patristic status with respect to the theory and practice of emotions. He was the only later author to be included in Geert Grote's list of preferred

23 Busch, *DVI*, c. 3; W. Simons, *Cities of Ladies* (Philadelphia 2001) 19-34 and 118-120.

24 Busch, *DVI*, c. 3.

25 Compare Hanselaer and Deploige, 'Bannicheit', 481.

26 Van Engen, *Sisters and Brothers*, 2-9.

27 *Ibid.*, 212-218.

28 G. Dumbar, *Analecta seu vetera aliquot scripta inedita ab ipsi publici aliquot scripta* (Deventer 1719) 171-172.

29 E. Makowski, *Canon Law and Cloistered Women* (Washington 1997).

reading. Furthermore, his books were frequently translated and copied in Devotio Moderna communities.³⁰

Saint Augustine defined human beings as a composite of body and soul. He made a clear division between the outer and inner person and regarded the soul as the true *locus* of a human being's similarity to God before the Fall. The Devout internalised his idea that self-reformation had to focus primarily on the interior. Provided God prompted a person to engage in the reconstruction of the self, feelings and thoughts could be guided in the right direction, for example, by exercising good practices. If one used practices such as manual labour, fasting and so on successfully and managed to reform one's interior person, these would lead to virtues, which in such a reformed human being automatically led to more good practices. In an unreformed individual the opposite would be true.³¹ Reading Saint Augustine's account of his conversion to Christianity in the *Confessiones*, it is striking how often he refers to emotions related to his desire to convert or to his postponement of conversion, telling us at length about his likes and dislikes. Furthermore, he refers to performances such as copious weeping arising from contrition and desire. These are not only performances, but also tools that aid him in his progress towards God.³²

As far as the Desert Fathers were concerned, it is obvious that their biographies are the models for the lives of Devotio Moderna brothers and sisters: the authors copy formats and motives and compare their subjects to the most famous of these men and women, who invented the religious life in the deserts of Egypt, Palestine and Syria in the fourth century.³³ Like the tales about the Desert Fathers, the authors of the sister- and brotherbooks concentrated on describing what their subjects did rather than providing accounts of their inner motions. In the same way, both Desert Fathers and new Devout understood that practices engendered virtue and vice versa.³⁴

30 Geert Grote, 'De sacris libris studendi', in: 'Vita Gerardi Magni', in: Thomas a Kempis, *Dyalogus noviciorum* [Opera Omnia 6]. M.J. Pohl (ed.) (Freiburg im Breisgau 1922) 97-107; José van Aelst, *Vruchten van de passie. De laatmiddeleeuwse passieliteratuur verkend aan de hand van Suso's Honderd Artikelen* (Hilversum 2011).

31 Busch, DVI, c. 27; Krijn Pansters, *De kardinale deugden in de Lage Landen, 1200-1500* (Hilversum 2007) 165-201.

32 Augustinus of Hippo, *Confessiones* Book 8:12. James Joseph O'Donnell (ed.) (Oxford 1992) 28-29.

33 Nikolaus Staubach, 'Das Wunder der Devotio Moderna. Neue Aspekte im Werk des Windesheimer Geschichtsschreiber John Busch', in: A.J. Hendrikman et al. (eds.), *Windesheim 1395-1995. Kloosters, teksten, invloeden* (Nijmegen 1996) 170-185 and my article 'Disciples of the Deep Desert: Windesheim Biographers and the Imitation of the Desert Fathers', in: Jitse H.F. Dijkstra and Mathilde van Dijk (eds.), *The Encroaching Desert: Egyptian Hagiography and the Medieval West. Special Issue of Church History and Religious Culture* 86 (2006) 257-280.

34 *Vita Pachomii in Vitae patrum I*, H. Rosweyde (ed.) (Paris 1864; reprint Turnhout 1974) 7.

The sisterbook of Master Geert's House tells the tale of a sister who always grumbled silently to herself when she was ordered to perform menial tasks such as housework. Rector Johannes Brinckerinck told her to always reply by saying 'Gladly'. This actually worked, as eventually this fractious sister came to mean what she said and progressed in humility and obedience.³⁵

Moreover, Bernard of Clairvaux taught the Devout to regard the emotions as the best instruments for the attainment of perfection, as long as they were properly trained. He developed Saint Augustine's idea that they should be used and transformed in order to reach God. This applied specifically to love, which Bernard propagated as the defining characteristic of Christ, and which he regarded as the most important emotion.³⁶ Christ's love was demonstrated by his willingness to save humankind through his own suffering.³⁷

Suso grasped these ideas to their fullest extent, especially as far as the practice of love through suffering was concerned.³⁸ Furthermore, he taught the Devout the extent of imitation: they were to strive for 'conformance' to and the 'absorption' of Christ. Among the biographers, Johannes Busch is the most outspoken about the success of his brothers in achieving this. Borrowing Susonian phrases, he actually described them and other Devout as perfect conformers to or absorbers of Christ, as when he describes how Brother Gerard of Delft used to be absorbed by love for and from the lover (i.e. Christ).³⁹

Medical theories and social context

The previous section listed the sources of Devout ideology and practice to which the Devout referred explicitly. In addition, they shared the knowledge common to their day that for them was so self-evident that it was unnecessary to theorise about it, at least not in the biographies. To begin with, like the Poverty Movement, the Devotio movement was an expression of a need for penitence and conversion that emerged with increasing frequency in the Late Middle Ages.⁴⁰ This was related to the interiorisation of the faith, which is

35 G, f. 91r-92v.

36 Bernard of Clairvaux, *Sermones in cantica canticorum*. Jean Leclercq, Charles Hugh Talbot and Henricus M. Rochais (eds.) (Rome 1957) and *Ibid.*, *De diligendo deo*. Jean Leclercq and Henricus M. Rochais (eds.) (Rome 1963), abbreviated as DDD.

37 Bernard of Clairvaux, DDD, 1.

38 Pius Künzle (ed.), *Horologium sapientiae. Erste kritische Gesamtausgabe unter Benützung der Vorarbeiten von Dominikus Planzer OP 1* (Freiburg 1977) 3.

39 DVI, c. 26; Suso, *Horologium* 1:3 and 1:11.

40 Van Engen, *Sisters and Brothers*, 11-44.

usually linked to the rise of cities in the Late Middle Ages. Secular and religious city folk worried more and more about their fates in the Hereafter. Fear of Hell was seen as an essential trigger to conversion.⁴¹

Moreover, the *Devotio Moderna's* view of humankind was informed by current scientific opinion about the physical characteristics of human beings and about gender differences. As we will see, the way in which the latter are described shows how much they had become common knowledge. Some Brothers of the Common Life had expert knowledge, such as the medical doctor Everard Eyza from Almelo, who trained at least one brother from Father Florens' House, a community that owned several medical treatises.⁴²

The medical theory of the humours was important for an assessment of the measure of perfection in a human being and for the make-up of their emotions, reformed or unreformed. The basic idea was that health depended on the right proportion of the four elements of fire, earth, water and air and on the mixture of the four humours, which produced the temperament of a human being. As far as the differences between the sexes were concerned, the 'one sex' model was dominant, based on the Aristotelian theory that a woman was a defective man. When a pregnancy resulted in a girl, this meant that fire and earth had not developed sufficiently. This also had consequences for an individual's relationship with God. Traditionally, water and air were connected to carnality and fire and earth to God, pointing to such tales as Moses' burning bush or the Pentecost. Fire was connected to the work of the mind. Therefore, women were generally assumed to be less close to God, less intelligent and more inclined to sin than men.⁴³

From the Early Church onwards, doctors and theologians were convinced that the proportions between the humours could be manipulated. Men and women who lived ascetically could increase the measure of fire and earth. They not only became more 'manly,' but also more like God. This was especially highlighted in the lives of female saints, who were often referred to as being male.⁴⁴ In contrast, some biblical passages refer to the divine as fluid and feminine, most notably with respect to Wisdom. Traditionally, Wisdom had been

41 Jean Delumeau, *La peur et la peur: La culpabilisation en Occident (XIIIe-XVIIIe siècles)* (Paris 1983) 129-263.

42 W. Jappe Albers and A.L. Hulshoff (eds.), *Het Frensweger Handschrift betreffende de geschiedenis van de Moderne Devotie* (Groningen 1958) 149-152; Bernardus de Gordonio, *Lilium Medicinae*, City and Athenaeum Library MS. 111 E 3, ca. 1418-1438; Johannes de Tornamyra, *Clarificationes Morborum*, City and Athenaeum Library MS. 111 E 3, sixteenth century.

43 Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge, London 1990) 25-62; Joan Cadden, *Meanings of Sex Differences in the Middle Ages: Medicine, Science and Culture* (Cambridge 1993).

44 For example: *Vita sanctae Euphraxiae*, in: *Vitae patrum* 1, 1:14 and 17.

connected to the Second Person of the Trinity, the Son, or Christ. Late medieval women and their biographers appropriated his connection to 'humid' Wisdom, claiming that their natural characteristics enhanced their imitation of Christ.⁴⁵

Observing the emotions

Nevertheless, *Devotio Moderna* biographers first and foremost connect the emotions of the brothers and sisters, regardless of their sex, to fire. Apparently they considered their subjects to be well on the way to achieving the likeness of God. The brothers and sisters were *virich* or *fervidus* and occasionally bystanders saw flames or fiery rays around their figures.⁴⁶ Typically, the authors took an external perspective, observing how their subjects described their own emotions or drawing conclusions from their actions to create models that could be imitated by future generations of brothers or sisters.

The biographers describe emotions and their performance with varying intensity, which, in part, was due to a matter of format. Thus, in the short tales in the *Scriptum* and the *Continuatio*, Rudolph Dier and Peter of Hoorn did not expand on internal matters of their subjects but focused on their practices, whereas the longer lives at the end of the book provide more extensive descriptions of their subject's interior lives. In contrast to Dier and the other biographers in the *Scriptum*, Peter of Hoorn occasionally expressed his own emotions, with outburst such as: 'Oh, how everyone should praise this man [i.e. Rudolph Dier of Muiden – MvD]!'⁴⁷ Such rhetorical techniques were intended to trigger an emotional response in the readers. Meditation treatises used the same strategy.⁴⁸

Johannes Busch was also given to exhortatory exclamations. In comparison to the other biographers, he was more outspoken about how and why he described the brothers' lives, making it blatantly clear how his illustrious brothers imitated Christ in exactly the right way, in contrast to others whom he could and did mention (such as the Mendicants).⁴⁹ He felt that there was only one possible conclusion: his brothers must have been saints. The fact that they were not known to have performed miracles was unimportant: paraphrasing Gregory the Great, he argued that the saint is not made through 'exterior miracles', but by 'interior miracles' of the soul,

45 As Caroline Walker Bynum has argued in many publications, for example: 'The Female Body and Religious Practice in the Later Middle Ages', in: idem, *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* (New York 1991) 181-238, 365-393.

46 For example: DV, 206v-207v, 208r-208v, 219v-220r; D, f. 10v.

47 *Scriptum*, 132.

48 Van Aelst, *Vruchten*, 41-45, 287; *Horologium*, 1: 4; cf. Roodenburg on Johannes Brugman, this issue of *BMGN - LCHR*.

49 DVI, c. 3; Lesser, *Busch*, 127-208.

apparent in virtues.⁵⁰ As saints, the Windesheim brothers would have been the objects of Divine Grace from the start, which allowed them to avoid evil.

As far as emotions are concerned, Busch's work reads like a manual for the brothers on how to deal with emotions and how to use them in the acquisition of virtue. He provided extensive accounts of how junior brothers were taught: for example, the biography of Arnold of Kalkar contains direct quotations from this master of the novices, referring to the management of emotions, such as telling them that they should no longer agonise over past sins, as long as they had confessed them and repented, although the memory of such sins could be useful to remind them of their humble status as sinners. However, it was useless to keep on shovelling the mud, when there was no more harvest to be had, as he phrased it.⁵¹

Busch's descriptions concerning emotions were based mainly on hearsay: he did not recount what had occurred when a brother actually experienced an emotion, but recorded how he talked about it later, with the aim of educating his fellow brothers. An exception is the visionary Hendrik Mande, whom Busch described as beset by emotions such as love for Christ and shame about his sins, and as frequently being in floods of tears because of these. The reason might be that Busch was close to this brother and therefore in a privileged position to observe him – at one time they travelled to the County of Holland together.⁵² Another of Busch's specific traits is that he noted regional differences. For example, he thought the Frisians had coarse hearts (*corda rudia*), which made the job of Brother Werner Keenkamp more difficult when he became prior of the monastery of Thabor.⁵³

In contrast to the businesslike accounts in the first parts of the Deventer brotherbook and Busch's hearsay accounts of their emotions, the sisterbooks provide on-the-spot descriptions of the sisters and their emotions, although the authors did share the usual outsider's perspective. In the Diepenveen sisterbook it was considered acceptable to feign emotions as long as the sisters did so for the right reasons. For example, Sister Zweder of Richteren feigned grief over the deaths of her son and husband so that relatives would not suspect her plan to enter a convent.⁵⁴

Generally, in female biographies there are more tears, sighs, flushed faces, fainting spells and so on in evidence. The sisters' performances correspond to common opinions about womankind. As they were weaker and more humid, tears flowed more freely. As noted, this evidence of weakness could be used to argue that the sisters were more Christ-like. However, in Devotio Moderna sisterbooks, despite the higher frequency of tears than

50 DVI, c. 82; Gregory the Great, *Moralia in Job*, M. Adriaen (ed.) (Turnhout 1974) 20:7 and *Homélies sur l'Évangile* 2, Raymond Étaix, Georges Blanc and Bruno Judic (eds.) (Paris 2008) 29:4.

51 DVI, c. 24.

52 *Ibid.*, c. 45.

53 *Ibid.*, c. 33.

54 DV, f. 112v-113r; D, f. 21v-22r.

in brotherbooks, fire was more important as a sign of nearing perfection.⁵⁵ Compared to biographies of women from the Poverty Movement or from German and Alsatian Dominican convents in the fourteenth century, the importance of humidity was considerably less.⁵⁶

Compared to the Deventer sisters, the Diepenveen women were a lot more exuberant, as were the Windesheim brothers compared to their Deventer counterparts. This had everything to do with the fact that Brothers and Sisters of the Common Life had to survive in the cities amidst secular folk. Evidence shows that public emotional practices, weeping for example, could easily be connected to the Beguines.⁵⁷ Moreover, city and ecclesiastical authorities throughout Europe increasingly looked upon such practices with suspicion, both because they were connected to the behaviour of heretics and because they disturbed the peace.⁵⁸

All of the biographers list many distinct emotions, but fear and love were the most fundamental. Fear triggered the search for perfection, whereas love was *the* characteristic of those who had progressed furthest towards conformity with Christ. Moreover, love and fear were shown as engendering other emotions such as joy, grief or anger.⁵⁹ This is why the following sections will concentrate on these seminal emotions.

Fear

As Bernard of Clairvaux had argued, love was the defining characteristic of Christ: conforming to him in this respect was the ultimate goal.⁶⁰ Fear however, was a necessary preliminary to engaging in the search for perfection. According to the biographers, fear was an accomplishment for which one had to train and a gift of grace: God endowed the elect with fear to help them find the right path in the first place and then ensure they stayed on it. It was not the exclusive prerogative of religious people: according to Peter of Hoorn, many brothers had God-fearing parents.

Fear could take various forms and degrees of intensity, ranging from feeling anxious about being on the right path to fear of Hell. For example, the

55 Mathilde van Dijk, 'Henry Mande: The Making of a Male Visionary in the *Devotio Moderna*', in: Mathilde van Dijk and Renée Nip (eds.), *Saints, Scholars and Politicians: Gender as an Analytical Tool in Medieval Studies* (Turnhout 2005) 133-151.

56 Gertrud Jaron Lewis, *By Women, for Women, about Women: The Sisterbooks of Fourteenth Century Germany* (Toronto 1996); for example, L. Reypens (ed.), *Vita Beatricis* (Antwerp 1964).

57 DV, f. 219v; D, f. 18v.

58 Susan C. Karant-Nunn, *The Reformation of Feeling: Shaping the Religious Emotions in Early Modern Germany* (Oxford 2010) 10.

59 Compare Hanselaer and Deploige, 'Bannicheit', 486.

60 See note 36.

former was present in young Brother Egbert ter Beke, who was touchingly scrupulous. On his first day in Father Florens' House, he noticed another novice kneeling before meals and asking permission to share in the house's goods. When the rector gave permission to eat this brother did so with gusto. Egbert did not dare touch his food.⁶¹ For exemplary brothers ordination to the priesthood caused anxiety, as they felt unworthy of it.⁶² This was also the usual emotion in those who were elected to lead their communities.⁶³

More intense than such anxieties, the fear of Hell was a major trigger to conversion. After a lifetime of sin, Geert Grote converted after an almost fatal illness.⁶⁴ The best brothers and sisters were fearful until the very moment of death and meditated on frightening subjects such as Hell.⁶⁵ Vigilance was always needed because until their death it was always possible for their carnal nature to get the better of them. In *De viris illustribus*, death was accompanied by much sighing, weeping and moaning, not because the brothers feared it, but because they felt contrition.⁶⁶ The Diepenveen sisterbook contains heroic tales about sisters who had to fight demons and the devil on their deathbeds. Sister Gertrud of Rijsen engaged in a virtual battle of words with her opponent, who appeared to her repeatedly, first bothering her about a sin that she had not confessed, and later accusing her of sins of his own invention. Her sisters attempted to encourage her by denying the devil's contentions. Gertrud stood up to the devil and asserted that in the Hereafter she would be admitted to the virgins' choir. Eventually she became calm and happily confessed her love of Christ, addressing him directly. Her biographer concluded that her battle with evil ended in victory.⁶⁷

The anecdotes above refer to a well-trained fear that was instrumental in the search for perfection. The Deventer sister Fye of Rheden found herself on the receiving end of a carnal kind of fear when she was subpoenaed by the inquisitor in Cologne. She asked a priest to accompany her to face the inquisition: from cowardice he refused. When Fye understood that she would not receive help or support from human beings, she turned to God with all her heart and asked that He would go with her instead. So He did, giving her 'words and wisdom' to counter the accusation of heresy.⁶⁸

Fye's trust in God transformed her fear into courage and hope. Like other exemplary brothers and sisters she became conscious of God's most defining feature – love for humankind. As for the priest, lacking charity, he did not come to Fye's rescue. His main concern was survival in his present life, rather than a concern for the Hereafter. He was certainly no model of what had

61 *Scriptum*, 164.

62 For example: *Scriptum*, 67. The same is true for the Windesheim canons; see *DVI*, c. 12.

63 For example: *DVI*, 19v; *D*, f. 3v.

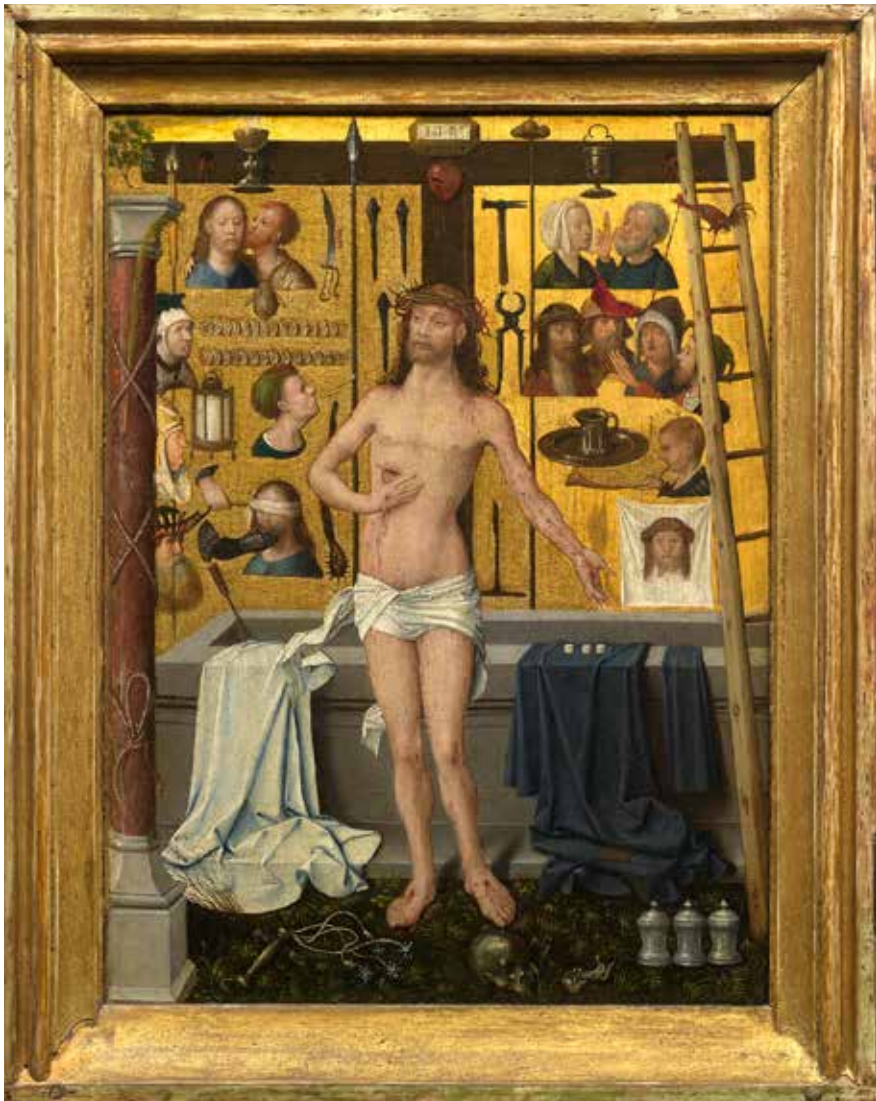
64 *Scriptum*, 3-4.

65 *DVI*, c. 39.

66 For example: *DVI*, c. 22.

67 *DV*, f. 183r-188v; *D*, f. 122v-125r.

68 Quoting Luke 21:15 *G*, f. 51v.



The image of the *Arma Christi* i.e. the instruments of his torture, were intended to provoke an emotional response in the viewers and were used as such in the *Devotio Moderna*.

Goswin van der Weijden, *Arma Christi* (detail triptych), 1507.

Lukas - Art in Flanders vzw / Royal Museum of Fine Arts, Antwerp.

Photographer: Dominique Provost.

been regarded as the most important characteristic of Christ since Bernard of Clairvaux – love.⁶⁹

Love

Indubitably, love is the most important sign of having achieved conformity to Christ. The brothers and sisters followed Bernard of Clairvaux's advice in taking as their point of departure humankind's natural capacity to love, coming to love God and eventually to love humankind as He did. Transformed love led to charity – the wish to help others attain salvation, with the lovers of humankind recognising the image and likeness of God in their fellow human beings.⁷⁰ Occasionally love engendered other emotions. Prior Willem Voornken's anger at unmotivated brothers was an expression of his fatherly love.⁷¹ Several Deventer sisters grieved over sisters who did not do their best.⁷²

Love was strongest in Devotio Moderna leaders, male and female: they were considered more Christ-like than their brothers and sisters because they loved more. According to Busch, sub-prior Arnold of Kalkar was 'like a mother to us and consoled us from his inner breasts' – echoing the representation of Christ as a feeding mother, so frequent in late medieval images and texts.⁷³

Other brothers and sisters also excelled in love and helped each other to attain salvation. Diepenveen sisters made pacts in which they agreed to watch over each other's spiritual progress.⁷⁴

Love connected the sisters and brothers on a cosmic scale. The best brothers and sisters conversed with Christ and the saints in heaven on a daily basis and regarded them as their friends, in the full medieval sense of the word. To the Deventer sister Mette of Delden, Saints Augustine and Bernard were her brothers and Thomas Aquinas was her uncle. The other saints were her cousins, while Christ and Mary were her parents.⁷⁵ Thus she became a part of the community of the saints in her lifetime.

The extent to which brothers and sisters had absorbed Christ was clear from their willingness to suffer as He had done from love for humankind.⁷⁶ It was a gift of grace that allowed training in conformity to Christ and in fact was indispensable for this. The Diepenveen sister Trude Schutten was provided with an excellent opportunity to experience this when she resisted the election of Sticken as prioress. Opposition to the result was tantamount to opposing

69 See footnote 36.

70 DDD, c. 10.

71 DVI, c. 49.

72 G, f. 18v.

73 DVI, c. 22. Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley 1987).

74 For example: DV, f. 312v; D, f. 33v-34r.

75 G, f. 127v.

76 See note 36.



▲
Images and texts such as these inspired sisters and brothers to an emotional response and to the desire to suffer like Christ did.

Book of prayers, 1477.

City Archive and Athenaeum Library, Deventer.

God, as He was thought to be guiding the voters. The other sisters therefore despised her, although she had been highly respected before this. She used their treatment to rise above herself, suffering it meekly, as Jesus Christ had done, and loving most the sisters who were cruellest to her. Her patience and charity were proof of her being a true imitator of Christ. According to the sisterbook, this episode was necessary for her to absorb Christ. She learnt that 'pure gold' was available only 'in the furnace of suffering'.⁷⁷

Well-trained love led to performances such as weeping. Mande wept so much during Mass, particularly at the moment of transubstantiation, that he soaked his habit and flooded the Choir floor.⁷⁸ Although nobody wept as much as he, it is clear that, according to the biographers, dissolving into tears was part of the ordinary behaviour of the truly pious, as it had been from the Desert Fathers onwards. The latter wept primarily from contrition; from Bernard of Clairvaux onwards it became an advisable practice weeping from love. Images of Christ grieving or weeping, bleeding on the Cross or amidst the instruments of his torture, were intended to provoke an emotional response. It is no coincidence that the most copious weepers were visionaries. Tears were seen as gifts of grace and as signs of proximity to the Lord. The Diepenveen sisterbook adds signs such as moaning and a flushed face. The latter was a sign of proximity to the seraphim, who were supposed to be closest to God. These angels are always shown as having red faces.⁷⁹

Like fear, the natural inclination to love could lead both towards and away from God, as is shown in the Diepenveen tale about Sister Salome of the Wiel and her brother Anthony. It contrasts their well-trained love with the unreformed love of their parents. Anthony, a Brother of the Common Life at Zwolle, persuaded Salome to run away with him to Diepenveen. Their parents stopped at nothing to secure her return. Eventually the mother went to Diepenveen in an attempt to persuade her daughter not to join the convent, and when the latter would not change her mind the mother became ill with rage. Salome then received permission to leave the convent to take care of her, which she did lovingly. When her mother was well enough to travel, Salome went to bid her farewell, and her mother seized her last chance, attempting to force her on board her boat.⁸⁰

Through all of this, the biographer is adamant that Salome's parents loved her. It is equally clear that their love, which caused them to become enraged, violent and mad, was of the wrong kind. In the biographies, family love is always presented as a distraction on the road to perfection, unless, like Anthony's, it was transformed. His natural love for his sister developed into a higher form: he loved her as Christ did and had her real happiness in mind in

77 Quoted after DV, f. 64r: 'Puer golt inden aven des lidens', Daniel 3.

78 DVI, c. 43.

79 DV, f. 219v; D, f. 18v.

80 DV, 308v-316r; D, 166r-171v.

showing her the road to salvation. Salome in turn acted like a loving bride of Christ in obeying her brother.

Conclusion

The Devout did not create an ideology of emotions that differed from other late medieval religious movements. Moreover, their views corresponded to those developed in the Early Church by Saint Augustine and the Desert Fathers, and later by Bernard of Clairvaux and Suso, who taught that after the Fall humankind should aim to return to the state originally created by God. This involved a redirection of the interior life by training in the virtues and by realigning the emotions. Both could be accomplished with the assistance of Divine Grace. Performances such as weeping would either be a sign of or an instrument in the reformation of the self.

There is little or no development as far as the theory and performance of emotions is concerned. This is not to say that all Devout expressed their emotions in quite the same way. Emotional styles differed in the *Devotio Moderna* between men and women and between those who had or had not taken vows. The biographers agreed with the usual beliefs about differences between the sexes. Women wept, sighed, moaned and fainted more frequently. In both sexes such emotional performance was a sign of proximity to God, although fieriness was the ultimate sign. Brothers and Sisters of the Common Life were more restrained than regular canons and canonesses: living alongside their secular neighbours, they wanted to avoid notoriety. Before the approval of their lifestyle at Constance, the Brothers and Sisters of the Common Life particularly tried to avoid being associated with the performances ascribed to the Beguines, such as excessive public weeping. Later, they were wary of attracting the attention of secular and ecclesiastical authorities, who disapproved of such emotional practices throughout Europe.

In describing the brothers and sisters, *Devotio Moderna* biographers mainly adhered to the model of the Desert Fathers, focusing on good practices rather than on accounts of what occurred within the individual. Although some male and female Devout did engage in practices such as weeping, moaning, fainting and so on, these were low key compared to similar performances in the Poverty Movement, including the way in which Suso described these in the widely copied *Hundert Betrachtungen*.

The Devouts' restraint and measured practices made them suitable objects for appropriation by Dutch historians and theologians from the nineteenth century onwards, as they were among the characteristics that they liked to ascribe to themselves, something they continue to do to the present day. However, the construction of the Devout as a *lieu de mémoire* of the Dutch national character relies on a myth. If they were measured and restrained, it was not because they were 'Dutch', but for other reasons, including the

social context of late medieval European cities in which overly dramatic performances increasingly met with disapproval. Furthermore, compared to similar religious movements, they had internalised the Augustine-inspired view of perfection being attained and residing in the interior person more thoroughly. Although their fellow brothers and sisters still recognised perfection in the exemplary members of their communities by the latter's practices, these were not necessarily loud and showy. Finally, their biographies imitate the format of the Desert Fathers' lives, being more concerned about descriptions of practices than of dramatic perturbations of the soul. ◀

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